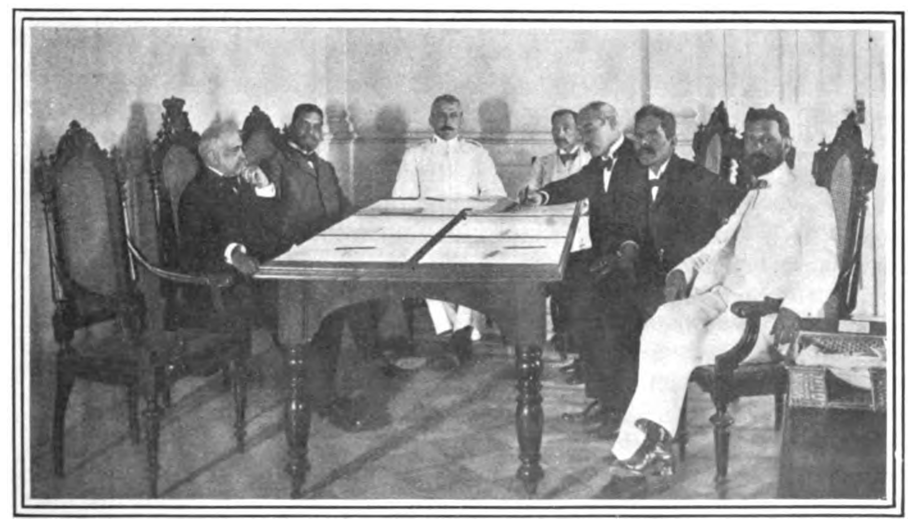
THE NATIONAL CONVENTION OF CUBA.

By William A. Varty and Louis Davidson.

An authoritative article, written by special correspondents of Leslie's Monthly, concerning an experiment of importance to every American citizen. Does the Convention mark the birth of a Cuban nation, in the true sense? Let each reader ask himself this question.

Medal worn by the Society of Veterans of the Revolution.

TO the native Cuban, whose conception and ideas of emancipation and true freedom are yet somewhat vague, the convening of a Constitutional Convention implied the birth of a new liberty—the omnipotent realization of an oft recurring dream. It should not be inferred from this that other conditions than those which have given to the Cubans the utmost freedom, as well as the fullest exercise of their liberties, have prevailed since the island passed to the authority of the United States. On the contrary, under the Military Government of Intervention, the people of Cuba have enjoyed greater privileges and have exercised the prerogatives of liberty to a fuller extent than do the people of any other state or territory of the United States. The question, then, with the average Cuban is not one of real liberty, but of the ideal; for the Cuban, true to the instincts of the Latin races, is nothing if not an idealist in all matters which may affect either his pride, his political preferment, or well-being. Again, the Latin spirit strongly manifests itself in the Cubans, as it does in the people of all the Latin-American countries, in their unbounded love of excitement and amusement, as a stimulant to their highly nervous temperaments, and consequently these people are to be always found in either the valley of sunshine or the vale of tears, without any happy mean to these extreme conditions. Their strong emotions make of them



General Wood and the Insular Secretaries of his Cabinet, from a photograph taken especially for this article. The vacant chair is that of Secretary of Agriculture, La Costa, who as a citizen of the United States had gone to Cincinnati in order to cast his vote on November 6th.

intense hero-worshippers, and, paradoxical though it may appear, the Latin-Americans take an intense delight in idealizing, for a time, a hero, ofttimes created such without the merit of deserving, until they have converted the object of their fond idolatry into a dictator or tyrannical master, for the mere pleasure of plucking down from his exalted place the former object of their worship.

The joint resolution of the Congress of the United States, dated April 20, 1898, reads as follows:—

"That the people of the Island of Cuba are, and of right ought to be, free and independent;

"That the United States hereby disclaims any disposition or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction or control over said Island, except for the pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when this is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the Island to its people."

Acting under this resolution, the initial step taken by the President, to prepare the people of Cuba for sovereign government and to test their capability for such, was to direct an order to the Military Governor of the Island to hold municipal elections, and it was owing to the success of these elections, due to their character, as well as to the intelligence manifested by the people in the exercise of their suffrages, that on the 11th day of August, General Wood, acting under the authority of the President, promulgated an official call for the holding of general elections, on the third Saturday of September last passed, "to elect delegates to a convention to meet in the city of Havana, on the first Monday in November, in the year 1900, to frame and adopt a constitution for the people of Cuba, and, as a part thereof, to provide for and agree with the government of the United States upon the relations to exist between that government and the government of Cuba, and to provide for the election by the people of officers under such constitution and the transfer of government to the officers so elected."

In the early municipal elections party lines had begun to divide the people, and three parties, named in their relative strength and importance, the National Party, the Republican and the Union Democratic, came prominently forward.

The Australian ballot system had been adopted, the names of the candidates, in alphabetical order, being printed on the ballots.

Soon after the promulgation of the official call for delegates to the Constitutional Convention, it became apparent that many electors, as well as candidates, were dissatisfied with the conditions imposed, and strenuously objected to the clause making it incumbent upon the Convention to provide for and agree with the government of the United States upon the relations to exist between that government and the government of Cuba, setting forth that such an incumbency upon the framers of the proposed constitution would limit the scope and power of the Convention. All parties united in this protest. The Nationalist party appointed General Maximo Gomez, the ex-revolutionary chief; Dr. Miguel Gener, the present Secretary of Justice, and General Alejandro Rodrigues, Mayor of Havana, as a commission to wait upon General Wood and enter a protest against the objectionable clause; and this commission flatly informed the Military Governor that the said clause carried with it the full significance of a permanent protectorate by the United States over Cuba, if not the immediate annexation of the

Island. General Wood, feeling the temper of the party leaders, intimated to the commission that some modification of these conditions would be made. In the meantime representative leaders of the Republican and Union Democratic parties had directed personal communications to President McKinley, setting forth their complaint. Throughout the rank and file of the politicians this dissatisfaction became general, the Cubans accusing the United States of bad faith in its intentions toward the independence of the Island. In order to illustrate properly the feeling at that time, it is only necessary to recite an incident which took place at a banquet, given by the Veterans of the Revolution, on October 10th last. Each member wore the decoration of the order, a gold medal on which is inscribed the motto, "*Independencia o Muerte.*" ("Independence or Death.")

Among the invited guests was the Hon. Horatio S. Rubens, the well-known expounder of international law, who did so much to assist the cause of Cuba's independence by defending the filibusters in the United States courts. No American in the Island is more deeply respected, or enjoys the confidence of the Cubans more fully, than does Mr. Rubens, who, until recently, occupied the very responsible position of chief legal adviser to General Wood. Although Mr. Rubens was looked upon as a staunch advocate of Cuban independence, yet the high pressure of feeling was such that the good faith of all Americans was doubted, and it was secretly determined by the managers of the banquet to test Rubens's integrity of purpose, and, through him, to obtain a reflection of the intentions of the United States. To carry out this plan the committee cunningly contrived, in the order of toast responses, to sandwich Rubens in between an ex-officer of the revolution and Juan Alberto Gomez, the famous colored revolutionary fire-eater, a delegate to the present Constitutional Convention; the intention being that the first speaker should attack the good faith and intentions of the United States towards Cuba, to which Rubens would be forced to reply, and then to depend upon the oratorical pyrotechnics of the overheated Gomez to demolish any defense set up by the international lawyer. Rubens saw the trick, and answered the attack with an *argumentum ad hominem.* He told the veterans that a century of revolutions for the cause of *Cuba Libre* had inoculated the blood of every Cuban with a sentiment of distrust and doubt of the sincerity of the acts of his fellow-men; that, as recalcitrants, they had

GENERAL WOOD DELIVERING THE OPENING ADDRESS.

questioned the good faith of the United States from the very moment of the intervention, and had treated with suspicion the overt acts of the representatives of the people of the United States in the amelioration of conditions in Cuba after the war, as well as in the reconstruction of the Island; that, notwithstanding these animadversions, the United States was pressing calmly forward, carefully safeguarding at every point the pledges made to the Cuban people, and that the United States would continue on its straightforward course of preparing the Island for sovereign government. The frankness of Mr. Rubens's speech left the fiery Gomez without the necessary weapons of combat, and, through Mr. Rubens's well-trained diplomcay, an unpleasant incident was avoided.



Pedro Gonzalez Llorente,
Santa Clara,
President *pro tem.*

Owing to the open antagonism to the objectionable clause, fixing relations in the proposed constitution, General Wood made a trip to Washington in October last, in order to confer with President McKinley and Secretary of War Root upon the question of its modification, with the result that authority was granted to the Military Governor to modify the clause, by eliminating the words, "and, as a part thereof, to provide for and agree with the government of the United States upon the relations to exist between that government and the government of Cuba," and substituting therefor, "to formulate what, in your opinion, ought to be the relations between Cuba and the United States."



Martin Morna Delgado,
Santa Clara.

The Constitutional Convention, which had been created by virtue of the authority of the President of the United States, was to be convened by Major General Leonard Wood, Military Governor of Cuba, and representative of the President, and by him delivered into the hands of the delegates, in convention assembled, after which the future deliberations and acts of that body should be entirely free from any and all external influences whatsoever.



José Fernandez Castro,
Santiago.

The selection of the Marti Theater as the Convention Hall was a worthy tribute to the great Cuban patriot, hero and martyr, José Marti, whose melancholy end at Dos Rios in May, 1895, is remembered with too deep a regret to be recited here. He was the greatest of all the Cubans—the poet, scholar, statesman and soldier—the Simon Bolivar of Cuba. Though he rose to the highest place in the hearts of the Cubans, yet he never forgot his humble origin, and during a speech he was delivering at the beginning of the last war, when, perhaps, the thought of his own approaching fate had flitted like a shadow across his noble soul, he ex-



José Lacret Morlot,
Havana.

A GROUP OF DELEGATES.

claimed: "*Yo quiero cuando me muero sin patria, pero sin amo tener en mi tumba un ramo de flores y una bandera!*" ("When I die without country, yet without a master, let there be placed upon my grave only a wreath of flowers and a flag.")

By a special decree of the Military Governor, two o'clock in the afternoon had been appointed for the convening of the Convention. It was the desire of General Wood that the ceremony should be entirely without ostentation, and, as befitted the character of the work that was expected of the Convention, its inauguration should be thoroughly democratic and businesslike.


Leopoldo Berriel, Havana.

Notwithstanding the announcement that only those who were fortunate enough to secure special permits to the Convention Hall would be admitted, by one o'clock ten thousand people had gathered about the Marti Theater. At 1.30, when the delegates arrived, a band played the Cuban anthem, and suddenly from the flagmast at the top of the theater a piece of bunting was seen to slowly unfold itself to the soft southern breeze, and, as the tri-color of the lone star slowly crept up the staff, the Cubans quietly uncovered and bowed their heads beneath the flag that typified their independence.


Miguel Gener, Havana.

With characteristic American promptitude, at exactly two o'clock, the Military Governor, attended by his staff, and General Fitzhugh Lee, accompanied by his staff, arrived at the Convention Hall, and, through a double line of police, marched into the theater, to the salute of the band playing the "Star Spangled Banner."

Upon entering the Convention Hall, the thirty-one members of the National Constitutional Convention arose from their places and greeted the representative of the President of the United States, in the person of General Wood, amid a tumult of enthusiasm from the spectators.


Rafael Manduley, Santiago.

General Wood immediately proceeded to the vacant chair, thereafter to be occupied by the President of the Convention, and, in a most impressive manner, addressed the Convention as follows:—

"*To the Delegates of the Constitutional Convention of Cuba:*

"GENTLEMEN: As Military Governor of the Island, representing the President of the United States, I call this Convention to order.

"It will be your duty, first, to frame and adopt a constitution for Cuba, and, when that has been done, to formulate what, in your opinion, ought to be the relations between Cuba and the United States.

"The constitution must be adequate to secure a stable, orderly and free government.


Gonzalo de Quesada, Pinar del Rio.

A GROUP OF DELEGATES.

"When you have formulated the relations which, in your opinion, ought to exist between Cuba and the United States, the government of the United States will doubtless take such action on its part as shall lead to a final and authoritative agreement between the people of the two countries for the promotion of their common interests.

"All friends of Cuba will follow your deliberations with the deepest interest, earnestly desiring that you shall reach just conclusions, and that by the dignity, individual self-restraint and wise conservatism which shall characterize your proceedings, the capacity of the Cuban people for representative government may be signally illustrated.



Interior view of Convention Hall, showing delegates and spectators listening to the address by General Wood.

"The fundamental distinction between true representative government and dictatorship is that in the former every representative of the people, in whatever office, confines himself strictly within the limits of his defined powers. Without such restraint there can be no free constitutional government.

"Under the order, pursuant to which you have been elected and convened, you have no duty and no authority to take part in the present government of the Island. Your powers are strictly limited by the terms of that order."

Secretary Varona then read a translation, in the Spanish language, of General Wood's speech, whereupon General Wood again addressed a few remarks to the Convention, outlining to them their plain duty and reminding them that the question of the future relations between the United States and Cuba was a matter for consideration after the actual work of the Convention had been performed.

The Military Governor then wished the Convention success, and, accompanied by his staff and the other American officials, left the hall.

The effect of General Wood's speech had been electrical, and, as he left the building, the outburst of applause plainly demonstrated that the people were in entire sympathy and fully supported the straightforward and businesslike methods of the United States.

The temporary organization of the Convention was the work of but a

few moments. Upon the motion of a delegate, the oldest member of the Convention, Sr. Pedro Gonzalez Llorente, a Republican member from the Province of Santa Clara, was elected President *pro tem.*, while the youngest member, Sr. Enrique Villuendas, a Federal Republican delegate from the same province, was created the Secretary *pro tem.*

The President having called the Convention to order, Chief Justice Dr. Cruz Perez and the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court, who had been seated at the table of the presiding officer, arose, and the Chief Justice administered to the delegates the oath of office, of which the following is a translation:—

"We, the delegates elected by the people of Cuba to the National Constitutional Convention, do swear and promise to faithfully fulfil our duties. We publicly and solemnly renounce any fealty to, or compact with, any other state or nation which we may heretofore have owed or had, directly or indirectly, swearing loyalty to the free and independent people, and promising to accept and obey the constitution adopted by this Convention, and loyalty to the government established thereunder."

The oath having been administered, the presiding officer, Sr. Llorente, in accepting his election as the temporary president, addressed the Convention as follows:—

"*Delegates to the Convention, Ladies and Gentlemen:*

"My emotion is great, and I cannot find words to express my gratitude for this position—today the greatest in the history of Cuba. I know, my associates, that I was not selected because of my ability, but because of my age. My ability does not deserve such an honor. I will not tire you with a long address. We are not here to talk, but to work. In years to come history will not record what we have said, but what we have accomplished. It is not what we say, but what we do that will live in history for all time to come. Fellow delegates, we occupy responsible positions here. Let us appreciate this fact and labor earnestly and faithfully for Cuba's



General Maximo Gomez making a memorial address upon the occasion of the dedication of a monument to Maceo, and to his only son, both killed in the late war.

good. Let us be guided by justice, progress and, above all things, the independence of Cuba."

There are two great problems before the Convention, which constitute the paramount issues to be determined before it is possible to enter upon the actual work of making a constitution.



These problems are:—

First.—Shall the people of Cuba have universal suffrage?

Second.—Shall Cuba be a Federal Republic?

Those who favor universal suffrage contend that the true spirit of liberty implies equal rights to all, and that absolute independence is not possible where one set of men is empowered to exercise the right of franchise, to the exclusion of other men; that no form of independent government can endure when built upon conditions calculated to divide the people and set up class distinctions. On the other hand, it is contended that limited suffrage, with respect to the educational qualifications, will tend to stimulate education in the Island, and ultimately improve the social conditions, by placing as a premium the right of exercising the franchise.

To this it may be said that any proposition limiting the suffrage of the people of Cuba is destined to strike those who were foremost in the cause of Cuban independence, and who bear the scars of many battles braved for *Cuba Libre*. Such a procedure would at once bring upon the Island the dangers of a race war, and the ultimate overthrow of any government created under a constitution that limited the suffrage of the colored electors.

In the matter of whether Cuba shall be a Federal Republic or one State, a great many delegates appear to favor the Federal Republic idea, while others are bitterly opposed to this plan.

It has been pointed out in opposition to the plan for the creating of a Federal Republic, that to consider each province as an individual state would result in a number of ridiculously small states, the entire area of Cuba being about equal to that of the state of New York. To meet this objection, it has been suggested that three states be formed: the first to consist of the Provinces of Pinar del Rio and Havana; the second, of the Provinces of Matanzas and Santa Clara; and the third, of the Provinces of Puerto Principe and Santiago. This plan is opposed on the grounds that it would involve the formation of three separate legislative bodies, together with the other machinery of government for the states, each one of which would enact different laws. The Federalists say that they intend to make one code of laws for all three states, the mere suggestion of which implies a lack of practical knowledge of the matter in debate.

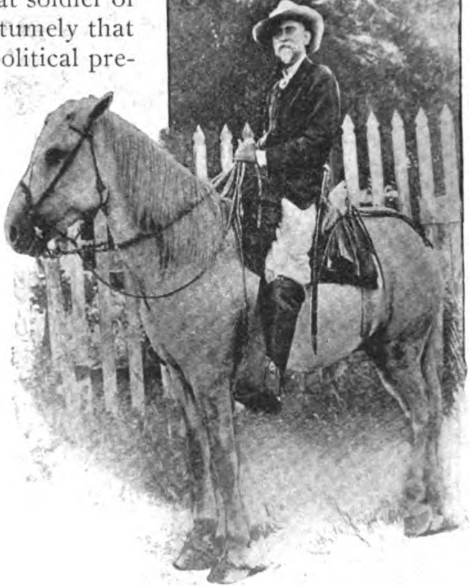
A further objection to the plan of the Federalists is that at present there is not sufficient income from internal taxation to support the governments of three separate states. The genuine reason for desiring it is what the Cubans call *decentralization*, which is an aspiration born of protest against the very highly centralized governmental power vested by Spain in her Captains General. The error lies in supposing that the Cuban chief executive could not have his powers limited by the constitution to prevent this evil, and in presupposing that the Cubans elected by the people will be as tyrannical as the officers formerly appointed by Spain. The better opinion seems to be that a modification of the French form of departments, and their Prefects, would meet the argument against centralization, and secure the Island



HON. HORATIO S. RU[redacted]

against the dangers of federation. The thirty-one delegates, who have been elected by the franchises of the freed people of Cuba, while all men of intelligence, have not among them a single masterful spirit such as characterizes the born leader of men.

Honorable old age, with its attending infirmities, has removed from the field of his usefulness the battered and scarred old warrior, Maximo Gomez, and we cannot too highly praise his admirable self-control in retiring from the political arena, crowned with all the glories of a great soldier of fortune, and untarnished by the contumely that must be his who would seek great political preferment at the hands of the people.



GENERAL MAXIMO GOMEZ MOUNTED ON HIS FAVORITE HORSE.

It is unfortunate for Cuba that the one man, after the lamented Marti, created by Cuba's wars of independence, General Calixto Garcia, who would have proved a worthy leader in this important hour, was removed from the political stage at a most critical period of the Island's history.

It was not as a soldier that Garcia's genius manifested itself. Indeed, it may be said of his military achievements that they scarcely passed mediocrity. But Garcia was a statesman, to the manner born, and for a man of his limited opportunities in the wider fields of statesmanship, he displayed an apt knowledge and keen perceptibility of the inner realms of statecraft that were truly marvelous.

What a strange anomaly! Of the four great figures—Marti, Maceo, Garcia and Gomez—created by Cuba's wars of independence during the last decade, three are dead, and the survivor incapacitated for further public service! Had Providence spared either Marti, Maceo or Garcia, that one today would have been the acknowledged power among the Cuban people, and the first chief executive of the Island; but, under present conditions, it lies not within the power of the mind to foretell, or truthfully prophesy, with any exactitude, what the womb of time is destined to bring forth for Cuba.

In connection with Maceo there is a curious bit of unpublished history well worth the telling. Marshal Martinez Campos and Antonio Maceo bore the relationship of consanguinity of the blood in the second degree. Campos's father was a colonel in the Spanish army and Military Governor of the onetime District of Mayari, Cuba, where Martinez was born. His mother was of Cuban Indian-African blood, and first cousin to the mother of Antonio Maceo. The father took the infant Martinez to Spain, where, under Spanish law, a man takes his nativity from the place of his church confirmation or baptism, and there the child was legitimatized and educated for military life.

Both Campos and Maceo were aware of the relationship between them, and, although bitter contestants on the field of battle, they held each other in great personal esteem, Campos having the highest admiration for the military genius of his cousin; for after the Treaty of Zanjon, when even Gomez had accepted the peace terms, Campos wrote to the War Department at Madrid, that "While Antonio Maceo is still in the field the war cannot be



The room where Marti was born. To the right is the patriot's mother. Next her sits his wife. The other two are Marti's son and daughter.

considered as ended." Later, after pursuing Maceo for nine days, Campos captured the stretcher or hammock in which the revolutionary chief, with nine wounds in his body, had been carried for thirty-six hours; but the stretcher was empty. Maceo had eluded his pursuers. But when the Castilian Field Marshal began to retrace his steps to Santiago, his troops were harassed by Maceo's men all along the road; and before they got out of the mountains, Maceo in person led an attack upon them. Yet, some weeks later, when, through the British Consul at Santiago, Campos solicited an interview with Maceo, which was accorded him, such was his confidence in the latter's good faith, that he went alone to meet his cousin in La Sabana. Maceo, who came with his immediate personal staff, was much taken back to find the commander-in-chief of the Spanish forces there without a single attendant, and immediately dismissed his own men. They talked for two hours, but Maceo would not surrender. Finally, however, he agreed to leave the Island, disbanding his men and burying his arms, provided the British Consul would come out for him and provide him with transportation to Jamaica under the British flag. Maceo never surrendered to Spain.